Great Anti-Smoking Myths:

Myth #1

Myth #2

Myth #3

THE TOBACCO INSTITUTE

Freedom of choice is the best choice.

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Great Anti-Smoking Myths

Some scientists, and many laymen, think we've all heard too much about risks to our health -- to the point where we may be in danger of becoming a nation of hypochondriacs.

Scarcely a week passes without our being informed that "(blank) causes heart disease," or "(blank) causes cancer." And every literate citizen can fill in the blanks with dozens of suspects.

But in a democratic society, each of us needs to know about risks so we can make our own personal "risk-benefit analysis." And society needs to know about risks so it can intelligently set public policy.

The true danger to our health may not be in knowing about the risks, it may be in the distortion and exaggeration of them -- in the myths that grow up about them.

In the area of smoking and health, there are literally dozens of myths, floating freely in, and poisoning, the stream of public discussion.

The best known is probably "the smoking dogs."

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Millions heard the story first from Walter Cronkite. "This is the first cause-effect link," he announced, "between smoking and cancer in higher animals." Front pages of newspapers carried the story: "12 of 86 'smoking dogs' get cancer."

But few heard the final, correct story. The two researchers had called a press conference and announced their results without the "peer review" by fellow scientists that is the only safeguard against false or faulty research. Two leading medical journals refused to publish the material. When it was finally published in a smaller journal, the 12 dogs had been

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reduced to 2 -- which were now claimed merely to show "microscopic" signs of cancer. And an eminent pathologist, reviewing the article, stated flatly that even as to these, "The photomicrographs in the published material are inconclusive as to the existence of any cancer."

But millions were misled by the original story, and still are.

Perhaps the most durable myth is that smokers' lungs get black from "tar." They don't. "Tar" is an artificially-produced condensate of smoke. It can be produced in a laboratory (not in a human body) only by cooling the smoke far below human temperatures. "I know of no way," the president of the Thoracic Society testified before congressional hearings, "to distinguish the lungs of a smoker from those of a nonsmoker."

But millions have been taken in by the myth, and many still are.

The most recent myth is the one deliberately propagated by the more extreme anti-smoking groups that "Your smoke is killing me." Jumping from one false conclusion -- that it is an already "proved fact" and a "closed case" that smoking causes disease in smokers -- they have leaped to the conclusion that smoke in the air causes disease in nonsmokers.

There is honest and searching debate among scientists about the effects of smoking on smokers; there is no such debate about its lack of effect on nonsmokers:

"As a scientist, I am interested in actual data ... (it) simply does not support the theory that a nonsmoker absorbs amounts which can cause harm."(1)

"The medical literature to date does not indicate any significant health risk to the nonsmoker from environmental tobacco smoke normally

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encountered in day-to-day situations."(2)

" ... it is not, in fact, actually harmful."(3)

"There is no evidence that other people's smoke is dangerous to healthy nonsmokers."(4)

Since this myth is deliberately propagated by anti-smokers who in many cases know it to be false, it is not merely a myth, but a hoax.

In citing these myths, we don't want to be seen as encouraging anyone to smoke, or to diminish in any way the warning notice on every pack of cigarettes. Each smoker must strike his own balance between perceived risks and perceived benefits.

Nor do we want to diminish in any way the sensible complaints that many nonsmokers have about the occasionally discourteous smoker, or the annoyance of the badly-ventilated "smoke-filled rooms" that everyone, including the smoker, finds distasteful.

On the contrary. We want to encourage full and free discussion and help, if we can, in finding courteous and reasonable accomodations between smokers and nonsmokers.

Myths and hoaxes, exaggerated claims and distorted facts get in the way of discussion and accomodation. They impede our freedom of choice, both as individuals and as a society. And in doing so, they are truly "dangerous to our health."

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The Tobacco Institute

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(1) Dr. Walter M. Booker, Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology, Howard University, statement before the New Jersey Public Health Council, October 20, 1977.

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(2) Medical researcher Dr. C.H. Hine, "Second-Hand Smoke -- Is It Harmful?" San Francisco Examiner, August 11, 1977.

(3) Dr. Jonathon Rhoads, Chairman, National Cancer Advisory Board, former president of American Cancer Society, in "A discussion of smoking and health," Newsprobe, WTAF-TV, July 16, 1975.

(4) "Pipe and Cigar smoking: the report of an expert group appointed by 'Action on Smoking and Health'." The Practitioner 210 (1259): 645-652; 1973.

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